

Abstract ID : 16

Title : CAPTIVE MANATEE ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR:
CONSIDERATIONS FOR REHABILITATION

Category : Behavior

Student : Not Applicable

Preferred Format : Poster Presentation

Abstract : Florida manatees (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) are endangered in part because of human impacts. Boat collisions, pollution and environmental degradation hamper manatee survival. Manatees with severe injuries are brought into captivity for rehabilitation that often takes months or years. An individual's condition is thoughtfully considered before release to the wild, including the potential impact of captivity. Yet, little data exist on this potential impact. Our objective was to compare the behavior of manatees held in six facilities in Florida. Because manatees are classified as semi-social, we incorporated interactions into our study. Using an ethogram and scan sampling, the activity patterns of 37 manatees at six facilities were determined over 180 consecutive minutes. All manatees had been in captivity for at least three months. We examined the influence of facility, manatee age, sex, season and length of time in captivity on activity patterns. No significant trends or factors with biological significance were revealed. We did not observe the interaction of human handlers with manatees. During a separate set of observations, we recorded contacts between manatees at four facilities housing 2-9 adult female manatees and in two facilities one juvenile male using behavior sampling and continuous recording. Virtually all contacts were non-aggressive. The number of contacts between manatees increased with density, but contacts were not random. When more than two manatees were present, manatees associated with a subset of the individuals. In summary, factors that may be associated with specific facilities or length of time in captivity do not appear to alter manatee behavior, suggesting that lengthy time in captivity should not eliminate a manatee as a candidate for release. Relationships maintained in captivity indicate the potentially social nature of manatees in the wild. These relationships may facilitate the successful reintroduction of manatees if associates were released together.